

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 EB-07
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FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4419
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY VALLETTA IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
CINCUSNAVEUR IMMEDIATE
COMSIXTHFLT IMMEDIATE
EUCOM IMMEDIATE
SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
USDOCOSOUTH IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TRIPOLI 0704

E.O. 11652:OPDS
TAGS: PFOR, PLOS, ENRG, TS, LY
SUBJ: CONTINENTAL SHELF DISPUTE: LIBYAN DEMARCHE

1. LIBYAN UNDER SEC. FONAFFAIRS ATRASH SUMMONED ME MORNING MAY
30 FOR PRESENTATION LIBYAN POSITION ON CONTINENTAL SHELF
DISPUTE AND TO CHARGE THAT PRESENCE U.S. NAVAL UNIT IN AREA
DANGEROUSLY COMPLICATES MATTER AND THREATENS GREAT POWER
CONFRONTATION.

2. ATRASH OPENED BY STATING THAT TUNISIANS WERE CREATING A
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PROBLEM OVER LIBYAN OFFSHORE EXPLORATION. THE TUNISIAN MEDIA
ALLEGATIONS WERE TOTALLY UNTRUE, SAID ATRASH, SINCE EXPLORATION
HAD BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SOME TIME IN AN AREA OF THE CONTINENTAL
SHELF WHICH COMES UNDER LIBYAN SOVEREIGNTY ACCORDING TO
ACCEPTED PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW. TUNISIAN DECISION
TO MAKE AN ISSUE OF LIBYAN EXPLORATION IN THIS AREA WAS PROBABLY
DUE TO ENCOURAGEMENT FROM "OTHER SOURCES".

3. LIBYAN GOVERNMENT WAS VERY SURPRISED TO LEARN OF PRESENCE U.S. NAVAL UNIT IN GABES. PRESENCE THIS SHIP, ATRASH CHARGED, HAS ENCOURAGED TUNISIANS TO ACT AGGRESSIVELY TOWARDS LIBYA. U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THIS WAY WILL FURTHER AGGRAVATE DISPUTE. HE ASKED THAT I INFORM USG THAT LIBYAN GOVERNMENT TAKES U.S. NAVAL PRESENCE IN DISPUTED AREA VERY SERIOUSLY AND REQUESTS THAT U.S. SHIP BE WITHDRAWN FOR "SAFETY ALL PARTIES CONCERNED". ATRASH SAID THAT IF SITUATION DETERIORATES FURTHER, AND IF TUNISIANS ATTACK, LIBYA WILL BE FORCED TO "FIGHT BACK IN SELF DEFENSE." SHOULD U.S. NAVAL UNIT TAKE ANY ACTION ON BEHALF TUNISIA, "IT MIGHT BE SUBJECT TO OUR ATTACK AS WELL."

4. ATRASH SAID DISPUTE IS BETWEEN TWO NEIGHBORING ARAB COUNTRIES AND PRESENCE FOREIGN NAVAL UNITS IN DISPUTED AREA DANGEROUSLY COMPLICATES SITUATION. LIBYA FOR ITS PART MIGHT BE FORCED TO INVITE NAVAL UNIT FROM A "FRIENDLY COUNTRY" WHICH WOULD SURELY ESCALATE THE SITUATION INTO A "DIRECT ENCOUNTER IN THE DISPUTED AREA." (COMMENT: ATRASH CLEARLY MEANS THAT THE SOVIETS MIGHT BE INVITED, LEADING TO A US-SOVIET CONFRONTATION).

5. ATRASH SAID LIBYA WANTS TO SOLVE PROBLEM PEACEFULLY, AND IS WILLING TO HOLD DISCUSSIONS WITH TUNISIA. SECRETARY FON AFFAIRS TURAYKI HAD HOPED TO GO TO TUNIS SATURDAY, BUT "TUNISIANS HAD MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO LEAVE TRIPOLI." LIBYA HOPES WISDOM WILL PREVAIL, BUT TUNISIAN PROPAGANDA AND "UNFRIENDLY ATTITUDE" MAKES NEGOTIATED SOLUTION DIFFICULT.

6. I TOLD ATRASH THAT HIS PRESENTATION WOULD BE FORWARDED
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IMMEDIATELY. I ALSO SAID THAT U.S. POLICY IS TO AVOID TAKING A POSITION ON LEGAL MERITS OF SHELF OR OTHER BOUNDARY DISPUTES TO WHICH WE NOT A PARTY AND TO ADVISE U.S. DRILLING COMPANIES TO STAY OUT OF DISPUTED WATERS. THIS IS LONGSTANDING POLICY AND IS APPLIED GENERALLY IN OTHER DISPUTED AREAS AS WELL. OUR HOPE IS FOR PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, AND WE ARE CONCERNED OVER SAFETY AND WELFARE U.S. CITIZENS ON DRILLING RIG WHICH CONTRACTED BY LIBYAN NOC AND READING & BATES CONTRARY USG ADVICE TO U.S. COMPANY. WE HOPED LIBYA WOULD TAKE NO PRECIPITATE ACTION WHICH WOULD IMPERIL OUR CITIZENS OR MAKE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION MORE DIFFICULT. AS FOR NAVAL UNIT, U.S. 6TH FLEET SHIPS CALL ROUTINELY AT TUNISIAN AND OTHER PORTS IN MED., AND THESE VISITS ARE USUALLY SCHEDULED SEVERAL MONTHS IN ADVANCE.

7. WHEN I ASKED FOR CLARIFICATION OF HIS REMARKS THAT U.S. SHIP MIGHT BE SUBJECT TO LIBYAN ATTACK, ATRASH SAID THAT HE DID NOT MEAN TO IMPLY A LIBYAN THREAT TO U.S. NAVAL UNITS. HE MEANT ONLY THAT LIBYA WOULD HAVE TO RESPOND IF ATTACKED, AND THAT

LIBYA IS CONCERNED THAT U.S. NAVAL UNITS MIGHT TAKE "SOME ACTION"
ON BEHALF TUNISIA. IN RESPONSE MY QUERY WHETHER LIBYA WOULD AGREE
OUTSIDE ARBITRATION OF DISPUTE ATRASH EVASIVELY SAID THAT
TUNISIANS HAD TURNED DOWN SEVERAL LIBYAN SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLUTION.

8. REQUEST INFO ON U.S. NAVAL ACTIVITY TUNISIA/DISPUTED AREA,
AND DEPT GUIDANCE FOR OUR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH LIBYANS.
BERGSTROM

NOTE BY OC/T: DISTRIBUTION COORDINATED WITH MS. SMITH, S/S-O.

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